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ABSTRACT

The overall structure of the proposed Master of Arts Degree in Applied Communication at Indiana University (Indianapolis) is interdisciplinary, in order to meet the many applied duties and functions of communication specialists, with special attention to be given to organizational communication and telecommunications. Each student will be required to take six semester hours of applied communication theory and research. Eighteen to 24 additional graduate hours are elected in the department of communication and theatre, with 6 to 12 more hours from areas outside the department. Still other areas to be complemented by the program include allied health sciences (for which there will be an upper division course in health communication), engineering and technology (with which some undergraduate telecommunication courses will be cross listed), public and environmental affairs, social work, and education. In addition the program is designed to enhance ongoing professional careers, that is, people already in positions, adult learners. Another advantageous feature is that the graduate program will conform closely to the objectives and general theme of the undergraduate curriculum. Although a concern has been expressed by those who feel that broad, liberal, humanistic training is pushed aside in such a proposal by those who promote practical job-related skills, the proposed program will be rigorous and demanding and will feature the critical thinking dimension that the graduate school says should be inherent in any graduate degree. (HOD)

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DEVELOPING A GRADUATE PROGRAM IN APPLIED COMMUNICATION FOR AN URBAN COMMUNITY

by

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West Lafayette, IN
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Throughout the Midwest, major state universities have residential campuses in smaller cities with urban counterparts in larger ones. To cite just a few, there is a University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and another at Dearborn, just outside Detroit; there is a University of Missouri at Columbia and another at Kansas City; there is a Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and another at Edwardsville, just outside St. Louis; and, of course, there is Indiana University at Bloomington and a counterpart at my institution in Indianapolis. Often several faculty members of the urban campuses did their doctoral study at the residential ones and they have a natural tendency to want curricula similar to those of their alma maters. Yet, it is possible that metropolitan situations lend themselves to somewhat different emphases, such as urban history, applied anthropology, applied sociology, or, in the case of my Department, applied communication. Currently, my Department of Communication and Theatre has pending a proposal for a Master of Arts Degree in Applied Communication. More than a year after the Communication proposal appeared, our Dean issued a "Mission Statement" for the School which reflected the thinking behind our product. He said:

> The School of Liberal Arts has a particular responsibility to consider [its] role in an an urban community and in a university community devoted to professional training. This responsibility includes...an obligation ...to exert leadership in defining new and effective patterns of integrating learning and research with applied, professional, and educational pursuits. During the 1980's the School of Liberal Arts will continue to expand into those educational areas where it perceives community or university need, particularly in graduate education.[1]

In today's presentation I will (1) describe the need for such applied communication programs in urban communities, with special

emphasis on Indianapolis; (2) explain the unique and adaptive features of our proposal; and, (3) explore the chief issues addressed in my department's deliberations.

In January, 1981, Martha Stout Kessler published a study in the ACA BULLETIN, entitled "Communicating Within and Without: The Work of Communication Specialists in American Corporations." In her research she had issued a questionnaire to presidents and chairpersons of 550 of the largest corporations in the U.S., selected from the FORTUNE DIRECTORY. These included industrials, commercial banks, life insurance companies, transporation, utilities, diversified financials and retail organizations. There was a twenty-five percent return which was well distributed over the kinds of companies written. "Nine out of ten [companies] predicted that the need [for communication specialists] would increase: 28.6% forecasting that their need...would increase a great deal, and 62.7% [predicting] their need would increase slightly."[2] There were projected needs for more communication specialists with interdisciplinary training in such areas as oral communication, journalism and English. Demand was stressed for training in such areas as speechwriting and writing for electronic media; writing speeches and writing for the media ranked fifth of the 61 tasks to be performed. Businesses especially noted the necessity of a mass media background for students embarking on non-academic communication careers.

Incidentally, communication specialists, as reported by the SCA Task Force on Alternative Career Opportunities, perform such tasks as editing internal and external publications; public relations; managing large meetings; media relations; speaking to public groups; directing

on-camera activities; conducting research by telephone and mail surveys; producing slide presentations; interviewing; diagnosing communication problems; and the list goes on.[3]

In a study with results similar to Kessler's but on the local level, Gray Kreps interviewed sixteen representatives of Indianapolis business, industrial, and professional organizations to elicit reactions to and opinions of an applied communication graduate program. Interviewees included major Fortune 500 corporations, such as RCA and Eli Lilly, as well as large health care organizations, television and radio stations, advertising agencies, with most of the remainder virtually being in the same categories as Kessler's. All were at management and executive levels within the organizations they represented. When asked what they would like to see implemented in such a program, the largest number of respondents suggested some "practical" orientation. The pervasive recommendations included:

1. oral and written communication skills
2. information handling at different levels of the organizational hierarchy
3. skills in and knowledge of mass media, i.e. print, television, and radio.
4. listening[4]

Respondents rated an applied communication graduate program as being "Very Strongly Useful" for their particular firms. Its graduates were rated as "strongly employable." Possibly more important for our proposed program's objectives, they rated their current employees who might complete our applied graduate program as having a "Very Good Opportunity for Promotion" within their firms. Of the sixteen interviewed, eight indicated they knew of people,

including themselves, who might be interested in pursuing our graduate program.

In the Summer of 1982 our Acting Dean at the time, James East, conducted surveys of 1,100 Liberal Arts graduates and 501 graduate non-degree students. In both surveys the need for our type of program was great. This was corroborated in a March, 1981, questionnaire by Kreps of upper division students. All the survey, interview, and questionnaire data were included in our proposal to suggest the nature and extent of local demand.[5]

Our proposal has been developed to accommodate peculiarities of our locality and our university's structure; its uniquenesses are forthwith.

The overall structure of our program is interdisciplinary to meet the many aforementioned applied duties and functions of communication specialists. The chief areas tapped within our own Department are organizational communication and telecommunications. This is to give the student an opportunity to incorporate the tools of technology into his/her complex, diversifying organizational tasks. Each student is required to take six semester hours of applied communication theory and research. Eighteen to twenty-four additional graduate hours are taken electively in the Department of Communication and Theatre; and six to twelve more hours are from areas outside the department. To unite more closely the oral with written communication skills, we appointed the Associate Dean of the IU School of Journalism, Chair of the Indianapolis Division, as Adjunct Associate Professor in our Department; he has assisted in the development and promotion of our proposal. The Head of Media at the School of Nursing also was

appointed as Adjunct Associate Professor. More recently, the former chair of Sociology, an authority on polling and the sociology of organizations, has applied for adjunct status in our Department.

Our relationship with other schools was also symbolized by members from Business and Medicine being on the Search and Screen Committee for our new Director of Organizational Communication; a major criterion for that appointment was ability to coordinate graduate studies in our pending applied communication program. Still other areas to be complemented by our program include Allied Health Sciences (for which we have an upper division course in Health Communication), Engineering and Technology (with which we have cross-listed some undergraduate telecommunications courses of a technical nature), Public and Environmental Affairs, Social Work, and Education. The need for such interdisciplinary structure was accentuated by Gordon Zimmerman when he said:

> Reality is not broken up into neat components: the organizational world does not mirror academic subdivisions.
>
> Duties such as training, interviewing, counseling, task group leadership...and public information presume an understanding of related ...functions [such as in] ...marketing, personnel psychology... the advertising media...and scientific research and development."[6]

Our graduate majors will be taking courses in other areas and graduate majors elsewhere reciprocally could enroll with us.

In addition to an interdisciplinary thrust, our proposal is designed to enhance ongoing professional careers, i.e. people already in positions, adult learners. Procedural adaptation is made through scheduling; our proposed courses preponderantly are evening offerings and some are with our Weekend College. And, if the appropriate

situation should present itself, we even can have courses at shopping centers in training rooms of major department stores in Indianapolis; this would be part of our University's innovative Learn and Shop program. We can and must make our logistic decisions meet adult learning objectives while not detracting from the education of the full-time, more traditionally scheduled graduate students.

While providing some applied communication theory courses at the graduate level, some upper division-graduate courses with skills components are available to those students needing to refine such skills. It is recognized by many nowadays that we are developing "people-oriented" values in organizations--decentralized and participative management systems. If that is the general case, and I think it is, then we must inculcate oral and written skills in executives. Therefore, as Zimmerman has said, "we should emphasize our communication skills courses, especially at the upper division and graduate levels."[7]

In addition to the six new exclusively graduate level courses, then, the proposal will change fifteen upper division courses into upper division-graduate ones, and among these are courses which feature some skills aspects in addition to theory, e.g. Interviewing, Advanced Public Speaking, Persuasion.

Another advantageous feature, while not necessarily a unique one, is that our graduate proposal in applied communication conforms closely to the objectives and general theme of our undergraduate curriculum. That is why a substantial number of existing upper division courses can be incorporated into it. Not only are there major undergraduate tracks in our curriculum for organizational

communication and telecommunications, but upper-division courses with skills modules, among others, are from the more traditional area of rhetoric and public address.

And now to the issues within the field and, indeed, to some extent within the department, concerning such a program. There is a concern by those who feel that broad, liberal, humanistic training is pushed aside in such a proposal by those who promote practical, job-related skills. In other words, it's the "humanist vs. practitioner" conflict. I completely agree with the humanistic conclusion given by Jim Andrews at IU Bloomington, that "a good, sound education is surely a better preparation in the long run than mere `job training'." He was giving this view in response to a report of the I.U. Graduate School, which said that doctoral students must learn "the kind of critical thinking--the process of problem-solving--that is at the very heart of doctoral education [and] useful not only to the academic world but to the nonacademic world as well."[9]

I also agree with the Graduate School on that point and further with a main criterion advanced by Jeffrey Auer and Pat Bradly (now Andrews) for their new M.A. option entitled the "Professional Communication" program. The criterion was that the program be "as rigorously demanding academically as any other in the graduate program."[10] Although our new graduate program will have no other in the Department with which to compare, I am confident it will be rigorous and demanding, and it will feature the critical thinking dimension which the Graduate School says should be inherent in any graduate degree.

Unlike the Bloomington master's option in professional communication, however, our proposal does offer completely new courses

which are specificially designed for and unique to the applied communication program.

As Andrew Wolvin, former chair of SCA's Applied Communication Section, has said: "Redoing a curriculum to provide more of a career focus does not necessarily have to lead to a bastardization of our academic traditions and integrity."[11] Incidentally, both Andrews and Wolvin have read the proposal and their endorsement letters are included in its final draft. So that issue appears to have been resolved.

Another issue concerns the academic backgrounds of several departmental faculty members, including me. who have "traditional" course work rather than more specialized study in organizational and/or applied communication. Admittedly, specialized persons are required for some of the more exclusive courses at the graduate core level, and our proposal builds-in a request for personnel needed in addition to our current faculty. But many above-mentioned upper division-graduate courses of a more traditional nature, involving theory and skills application, are included in the proposal and can be taught well by so-called humanists or traditionalists.

Finally, what is the possible resource impact on undergraduate offerings? Our School has decreed that undergraduate resource needs cannot be superseded in order to establish a graduate program. Thus, the proposal is to be funded on its own merits, separately from existing departmental demands and operations. Of course, even the undergraduate resource needs of our Department have been woefully neglected in the past by the administration, so we approach our latest proposal with highly cautious optimism.

Nevertheless, while there are still obstacles before our proposal, we are pleased to assume a suitable curricular role and responsibility at our metropolitan University. I close with a statement from friend and colleague from Bloomington, Jim Andrews, who said concerning our proposal:

> The program seems clearly and explicitly focused and obviously taps a clientele appropriate to the urban setting...
>
> What you have presented is a good, workable plan that takes full advantage of the curriculum now in place and projects appropriate and necessary changes.[12]

We hope for passage and implementation of an M.A. Degree in Applied Communication at Indianapolis.

ENDNOTES

1. William M. Plater, "SLA MISSION," Spring, 1984, p. 1

2. Martha S. Kessler, "Communicating Within and Without,"ACA Bulletin, 35 (January, 1981), p. 47.

3. In Andrew D. Wolvin, "New Directions for Careers in Communication," ACA Bulletin, 35 (January, 1981), p. 55

4. "Proposal for Master of Arts Degree in Applied Communication," State of Indiana Commission for Higher Education New Degree Program Request, 1982, p. 10.

5. Ibid, pp. 8-12.

6. Gordon I. Zimmerman, "Future Trends in Academic Training in Organizational Communication," ACA Bulletin, 25 (August, 1978), p. 21.

7. Ibid., p. 20.

8. James R. Andrews, "Into the World of Woe: Graduate Education in Speech Communication in the 1980's" ACA Bulletin, 40 (April, 1982), p. 20.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Wolvin, Ibid., p. 55.

12. "Proposal for Master of Arts Degree in Applied Communication," Ibid. p. 50.